

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
AND
DECISION NOTICE
FOR
BROWN TROUT EGG AND FISH REMOVAL FROM MILL CREEK**

October 25, 2000

Project Proposal and Justification:

In October 1999 MFWP personnel discovered a reproducing population of nonnative brown trout inhabiting Mill Creek, a tributary to the Flathead River near Creston (T28, R20W, Sec.16). This is the first time brown trout have been verified in the Flathead drainage upstream from Kerr Dam. Brown trout directly compete with bull trout (ESA listed species) for spawning, rearing, and food and space resources. The purpose of this project is to suppress or eradicate a resident population of brown trout in Mill Creek to minimize potential threats to native species in the Flathead River drainage. Failure to immediately suppress and eradicate this population may result in brown trout colonizing other areas of the river-lake system and possibly reducing the abundance and distribution of native fishes. This action is consistent with the Governor's Bull Trout Restoration Team recommendation for removal or suppression of introduced fish to aid in bull trout recovery. The primary action is identifying brown trout redds in the fall and disturbing the redd (approximately 2 x 3 x 1 ft. deep) with a hand shovel to dislodge eggs to be washed down to a hand screen held downstream.

Environmental and Social Impacts of Project:

There will be minor short-term impacts to some aquatic organisms in Mill Creek. However, minor impacts will be short-term and insignificant. Removal of brown trout and viable eggs will result in direct mortality to brown trout. Temporary substrate removal will displace aquatic insects at each redd site and will include short-term increases in turbidity (20-30 seconds). No social impacts are expected since Mill Creek is privately owned with limited public access and there is not an established brown trout recreational fishery in the creek.

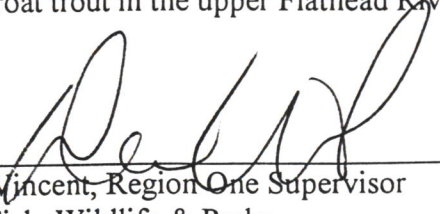
Public Involvement:

In compliance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act, an environmental assessment was prepared and circulated for public comment from September 18 through October 2, 2000. Notices were advertised in local newspapers and copies of the EA were made available at local libraries, and FWP, Region 1, headquarters in Kalispell. The following comments were received:

- One comment was received in favor of all aspects of the project.
- One comment was received that stated a Stream Protection Act 124 permit was required. However, a 124 permit is not necessary for the proposed actions.

Decision notice:

Based on the comments and urgent need to remove brown trout from Mill Creek, I recommend that the proposed project be implemented and continued as needed to reduce or eliminate the potential, adverse impacts of brown trout on native bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout in the upper Flathead River system.



Dan Vincent, Region One Supervisor
MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks

10/25/00

Date